

Roman and Medieval Occupation at 47–53 High Street, Burford, Oxfordshire

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SUMMARY

A small archaeological excavation carried out on land at the rear of 47–53 High Street, Burford, Oxfordshire, by Thames Valley Archaeological Services has revealed late Roman occupation and eleventh- to thirteenth-century activity, including what appears to be stone quarrying.

This small excavation has produced surprisingly significant results, which are enhanced by the relative lack of previous archaeological work in the vicinity. The clear demonstration of Roman settlement in this location is the first substantial evidence for this period in Burford. The site produced a gully and several pits, with a moderate pottery assemblage, all probably dating from the late Roman period. Unfortunately most of the Roman pottery was in medieval features, and almost all of the features considered to be Roman were badly disturbed by the medieval occupation; it is not absolutely certain that any of the excavated features can be firmly dated to the Roman period, but there certainly must have been Roman occupation on the site, given the quantity of material, and the excavation did not reach the bottom of the stratified sequence. Oxfordshire broadly seems to exhibit a trend for sites to be newly founded (or thoroughly redefined) in the middle to later Roman period, rather than having continuity throughout the period,¹ and this site perhaps adds to this picture. It is of some note that the Roman gully is on a parallel alignment to the medieval High Street, but this is probably too slender evidence to permit the suggestion that the Roman layout prefigured the medieval town plan.

The single sherd of hand-made early/middle Saxon pottery is a rare find in this area, although in fact another had been found nearby. Unfortunately it does not provide any new information as it came from an eleventh-century pit, and although it is suggestive, there is no real evidence for occupation on the site between the end of the Roman period and the eleventh century.

The eleventh-century phase may have its origins in the early eleventh century, although the ceramic chronology is not sufficiently precise for certainty. This late Saxon or early Norman phase on the site oddly duplicates the nature of the Roman features in the west of the site, with a gully and large pits, mostly cut in the same locations as their putative Roman predecessors. Possibly there were some topographical constraints encouraging activities in the same locations through time; or perhaps even the features producing exclusively Roman pottery are all medieval, but cut into underlying Roman deposits.

The majority of the site's pottery came from a small number of large pits dating from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. These seem to have been quarries, backfilled with a mix of soils containing quantities of domestic waste.

The date of the medieval occupation is interesting; from a beginning in the eleventh century, possibly the early eleventh, which is slightly earlier than previous medieval evidence from Burford, the site was in use through to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, but then abandoned.

¹ Martin Henig and Paul Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 106–7; Paul Booth, Anne Dodd, Mark Robinson, and Alex Smith, *The Thames through Time: the Archaeology of the Gravel Terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames: the Early Historical Period: AD 1–1000*, Oxford Archaeology Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 27 (2007), pp. 75–9.

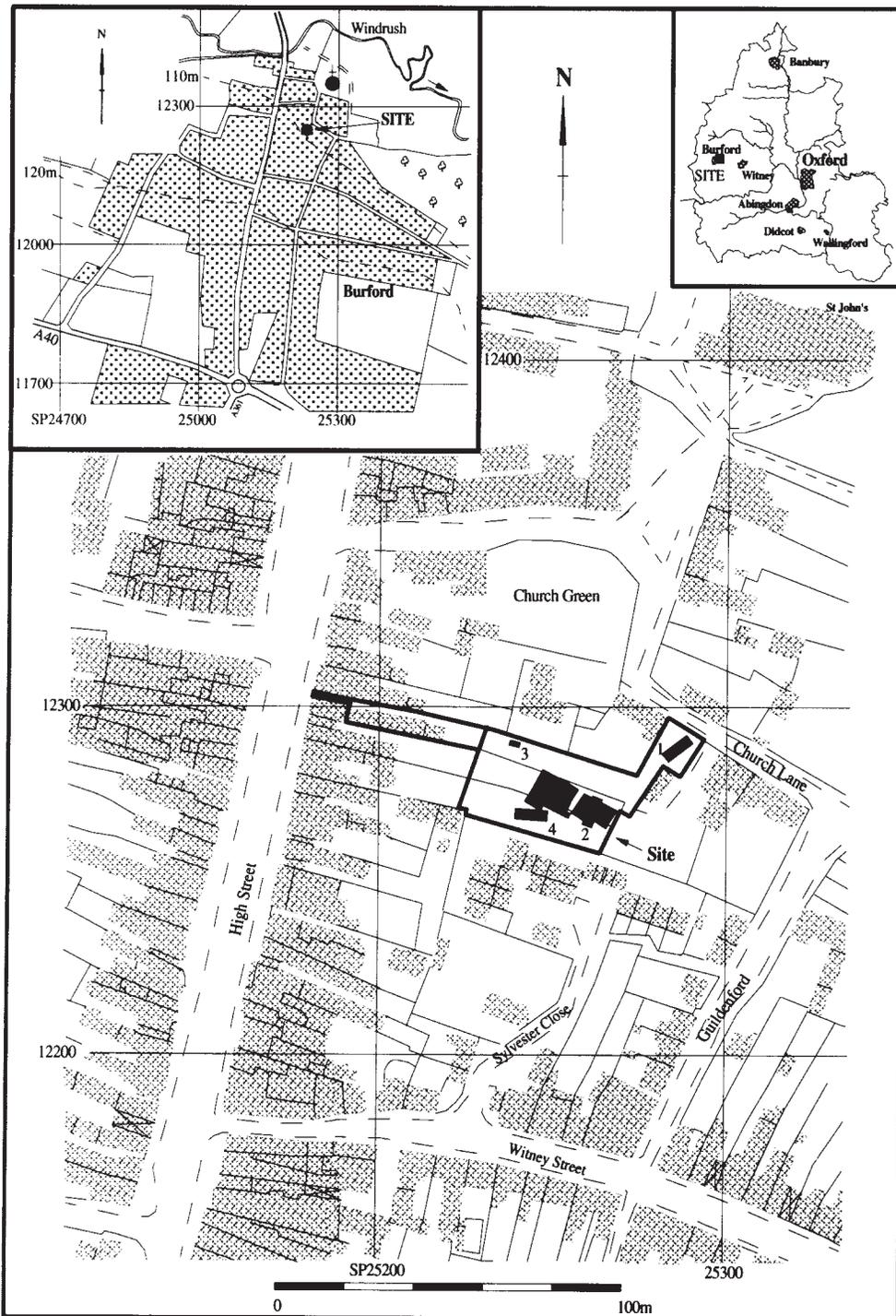


Fig. 1. High Street, Burford: Location of site, evaluation trenches (numbered), and excavation area

Abandonment in the fourteenth century, of course, is an expected trend, and an explanation based on either the direct or the indirect results of the Black Death is usually proffered. The countryside around Witney, for example, was devastated by the loss of two-thirds of the rural population in the plagues of 1348 and 1361.² This may be the case here, but there is no other evidence for any substantial decline in Burford's fortunes in the fourteenth century: indeed, it seems to have outstripped Witney in population and prosperity in this period, so it is more likely to be a purely localized change of land use.

The possibility that the large medieval pits on the site were quarries is an intriguing and significant one. Burford stone (including the noted local quarry at Taynton, just to the north-west) was highly regarded, and its supply one of the major industries of the county, along with wool, in the fourteenth century and perhaps earlier. Limestone from Burford or nearby was supplied to, amongst others, several Oxford colleges, to Windsor Castle in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, later to Wren and Hawksmoor for use in London churches,³ and to Vanbrugh for Blenheim Palace.⁴ It was, of course, also extensively used locally. There does not seem to be any previous evidence that it may have been quarried from within Burford itself rather than from Taynton or Upton, but the outcrop is extensive, and there is no need to doubt that this is what these features represent. Perhaps the cause of the site's abandonment can be found in the exhaustion of the stone supply, leaving this plot of land unusable for any other purpose, rather than indicating population decline. The excavation was too limited to provide data in relation to the broader question of whether the abandonment can be tied into any broader pattern in the town's economy. It appears likely that the abandonment of this site was a purely localized response to specific local conditions. Further work in the area would be required to begin to approach this question.

Finally, the site's layout tends to confirm that a wall removed during the evaluation probably was on the line of the original medieval burgage-plot boundary; a further short stretch of wall foundation may mark the rear boundary of the plot.

BACKGROUND

The site comprises an irregularly shaped plot of land, located behind numbers 47, 51, and 53, on the east side of High Street, in Burford (SP2524 1227) (Fig. 1), and covers approximately 0.14 ha. It lies at 105 m above Ordnance Datum, near the foot of a rather steep valley slope, overlooking the river Windrush, which flows by the town to the north. Geological maps indicate that the underlying geology is complicated, the valley sides exposing numerous strata, but the site itself is mapped as upper lias and clypeus grit:⁵ a combination of sandy gravel and orange clay was observed on site. Notably, exposed bands of Taynton stone and Chipping Norton limestone are mapped immediately adjacent to the site.

A field evaluation in advance of development⁶ had revealed well-preserved features and deposits, including pits and probably occupation layers, mostly of medieval date (eleventh to thirteenth centuries), with some residual Roman finds; as a result, and in accordance with PPG16 *Archaeology and Planning* and West Oxfordshire District Council's policies on archaeology, an excavation was required on the areas of new build, in order to satisfy a condition placed on planning permission. The excavation took place during March 2005, in generally dry, sunny

² *VCH Oxon.*, 14, p. 11.

³ Alec Clifton-Taylor, 'Building materials', in Jennifer Sherwood and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (London, 1974), pp. 406–8.

⁴ *VCH Oxon.*, 12, pp. 448–9.

⁵ British Geological Survey 1:50,000, series sheet 235, Solid and Drift Edition (Keyworth, 1982).

⁶ Stephen Hammond, 'Land to the rear of 47, 51 and 53 High Street, Burford, Oxfordshire; an archaeological evaluation' (Thames Valley Archaeological Services, TVAS TS report 03/82, 2003).

conditions. A watching brief was then held during service installation works on parts of the site outside the excavated area during November and December 2005. This report brings together evidence from all three phases of work.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Despite (or perhaps because of) the self-evident historic character of the town, archaeological investigation in the vicinity has been relatively sparse. There is little to suggest much activity at Burford pre-dating the Saxon period. Close to the site, two ditches were revealed in a watching brief, one of which might be Roman.⁷ A villa with a mosaic floor lies below the Church of St Oswald, at Widford, 2.2 km east of Burford, and Akeman Street passes some 3 km to the south-east.

Saxon evidence is also scant: a sixth-century burial is known from west of the town, and the place name certainly suggests late Saxon settlement (see below). A single tiny sherd of early/middle Saxon pottery came from a watching brief adjacent to the current site.⁸

The town, however, retains, to a quite exceptional degree, its medieval character and topography, with an unusual number of fourteenth- to sixteenth-century inns and merchants' houses surviving,⁹ and the site is within a well-defined area of medieval burgage plots, which is also a Conservation Area. Medieval finds and features have been revealed in a number of investigations in the vicinity.¹⁰

Burford first appears (as *Bureford*) in Domesday Book (1086) as part of the extensive lands of the Bishop of Bayeux, held by Earl Aubrey.¹¹ It was assessed at eight hides, with land for twenty ploughs, and some forty tax-payers are noted, with three slaves. There were two mills, twenty-five acres of meadow, and a rather large area (one square league) of pasture; it was worth £13. This makes it an extensive but economically modest manor. Witney, for example, with a similar population was worth twice as much.¹² Domesday Book does not mention a church at this time.¹³

Although it does not appear in written form earlier than Domesday Book, the place name is Old English (Anglo-Saxon), derived from *burh* (fortified place) and *ford* (ford). No evidence of any defences of this period has survived, but the town did grow up around the river. A reference to a battle between kings Cuthred of Wessex and Æthelbald of Mercia at *Beorgford* (or *Beorhtford*) in AD 752 has been assumed to relate to Burford,¹⁴ but this identification cannot be supported: the first part of the place name is *beorg* ('hill' or 'barrow') not *burh*, and the battle must remain unlocated.¹⁵

Burford's subsequent development appears unremarkable. It had a market by the middle of the twelfth century, a priory (hospital) by the last third of that century, a fair by 1323, and its prosperity always depended mainly on the lucrative wool trade and nearby stone quarrying, with malting and tanning developing later. The town's prosperity and population peaked in the late fifteenth to early sixteenth century, but declined steeply thereafter. Ironically, this decline is largely responsible for the preservation of its historic character, in contrast to, say, Witney, where

⁷ Oxford Archaeology, 'Archaeological watching brief at Rose Cottage, Church Lane, Burford' (OA, TS report, 2001).

⁸ Kate Taylor, 'Land adjacent to the Vicarage, Church Lane, Burford, Oxfordshire: an archaeological watching brief' (TVAS TS report 99/76, 1999).

⁹ Sherwood and Pevsner, *Buildings of England, Oxfordshire*, p. 501.

¹⁰ Cotswold Archaeology, 'Archaeological watching brief at the Old Ropery, Burford' (2000); Taylor, 'Land adjacent to the Vicarage, Church Lane, Burford'.

¹¹ A. Williams and G.H. Martin, *Domesday Book, a Complete Translation* (London, 2002), p. 428.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 425.

¹³ Pace J. Munby, K. Rodwell, and H. Turner, 'Burford,' in Kirsty Rodwell, ed., *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire: a Survey of the New County*, Oxford Archaeological Unit Survey No. 3 (Oxford, 1975), p. 69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Michael Swanton, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, rev. edn (London, 2000), p. 46, n. 5.

sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prosperity led to wholesale rebuilding.¹⁶ Few buildings in the core of the town are later than the eighteenth century.

The church retains a small Norman element, perhaps eleventh century, but was considerably expanded about 1190, and totally remodelled in the fifteenth century (and later).¹⁷ The Parliamentary army housed Royalist prisoners there in the Civil War.

THE EVALUATION

The evaluation comprised four trenches (Fig. 1).¹⁸ Two trenches revealed well-preserved pits and layers dating from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, with a significant pottery assemblage (including a surprising number of residual Roman sherds), and a relatively recent wall that may have marked the line of an original burgage-plot boundary wall. Animal bone was present and well preserved; other types of finds were recovered only in small quantities. It was considered that the lack of later medieval and early post-medieval deposits was perhaps a result of later truncation, and that the site had been continuously occupied since the eleventh century at the latest. Augering below the depths that could safely be reached by the trenches showed in places almost a metre of further cultural layers above the natural geology. One trench, from which no finds were recovered, seemed to have been located wholly within a quarry, at least 2.35 m deep. Late post-medieval pits also truncated the site quite extensively.

It was clear that the site contained significant archaeological deposits which would be destroyed by development, and thus full excavation of the threatened areas was required, with the aim of elucidating the medieval use of the site and establishing if there was indeed a Roman or Saxon site underneath.

METHODOLOGY

The excavation occupied two almost contiguous areas, totalling 180 sq. m (Fig. 2), where the evaluation had shown the development would disturb archaeological features. Topsoil and overburden were removed by a 360° mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless bucket to expose the uppermost surface of archaeological deposits. The adopted sampling strategy varied according to both the nature of archaeology revealed and the extent of the threat. Deeper deposits, below the foundation impact levels, were left preserved *in situ* after superficial examination. All archaeological deposits within the threatened levels were cleaned and excavated by hand. Bulk samples for environmental evidence were taken from twelve sealed and securely dated contexts, most of which yielded charred plant remains; samples from pit 18 and posthole 20 (within 18) were particularly rich in such remains.

The subsequent watching brief involved the observation of service trenches; several more features, probably pits, were revealed, but only a single sherd of pottery was retrieved from these, adding nothing to the interpretation of the site.

PHASE SUMMARY

Late Roman

Overall the Roman evidence amounts to one gully or ditch with probably two groups of intercutting pits, much disturbed by later features. The majority of the Roman pottery dates to the third and fourth centuries. A very little early Roman pottery was present, which may represent old vessels still in use in the third century. Features dated to the Roman period include gullies 1002, 1003 (probably originally the same feature), pits 9, 23, 28, all of 42-45, possibly 41 (or an unrecognized earlier cut below 41; fill 171 and perhaps 170), layers 71, 154=189=194; it is

¹⁶ *VCH Oxon.*, 14, p. 3.

¹⁷ Sherwood and Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Oxfordshire*, p. 502.

¹⁸ Hammond, 'Land to the rear of 47, 51 and 53 High Street, Burford'.

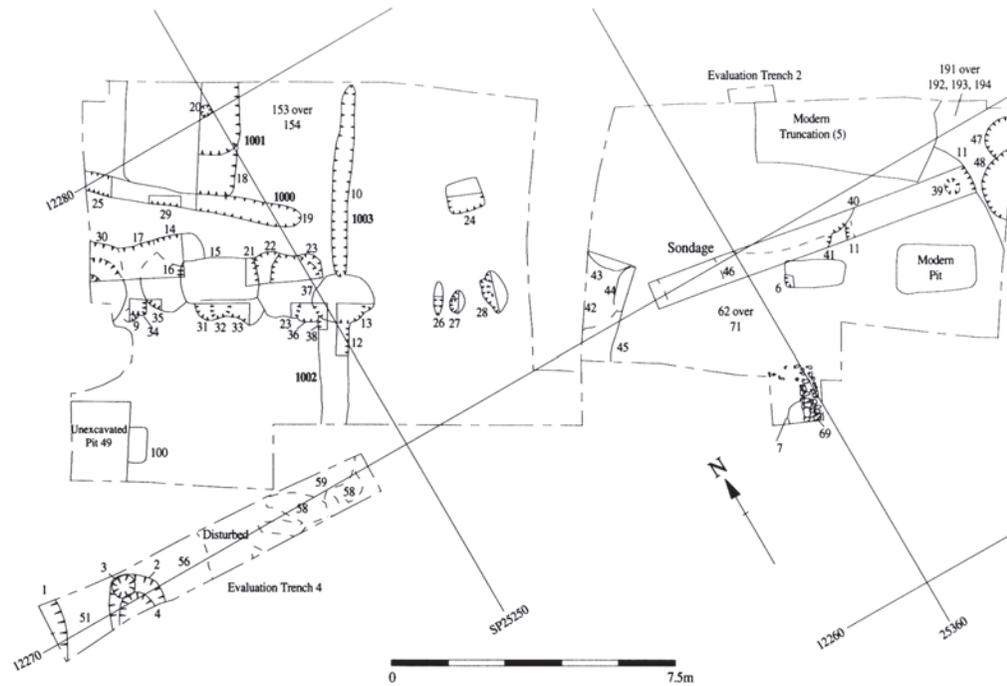


Fig. 2. High Street, Burford: all excavated features

possible that gully 1000 (slot 25) was cut through an unrecognized Roman feature. 'Layers' 58, 59, and 71 recorded in the evaluation can now be seen to have been the upper fills of Roman pits, equivalent to 40–45. Excavation did not penetrate below these layers, which will be preserved below the development.

Gully 1003 was fully excavated. It was 4.96 m long, 0.45 m wide and just 0.11 m deep, and both terminals were present within the site. It contained eleven sherds of Roman pottery. It seems to have been an extension of gully 1002, of which 2.8 m was visible in the excavated area. This was 0.39 m wide and 0.18 m deep; it was cut by pits 13 and 23. Two slots dug through gully 1002 contained eleven Roman sherds. It seems improbably coincidental that the line of this gully parallels the medieval High Street and is perpendicular to the medieval burgrave-plot layout, so it must remain possible that this is, in fact, a medieval feature containing (exclusively) Roman pottery. It is difficult to believe that this is solid evidence for a Roman settlement prefiguring the medieval layout.

Pit 23 was 1.20 m in diameter, but 0.85 m deep, slightly undercut on the west edge to a concave base. The three fills of pit 23 yielded ten tiny sherds of Roman pottery and two (even tinier) of eleventh-century pottery; the latter are thought to be intrusive in this much disturbed feature. Isolated pit 28 (1.12 m by 0.70 m, 0.24 m deep) contained six Roman sherds.

From the sondage opened in the eastern part of the site several pits were only very partially revealed; they have been preserved *in situ*. All of pits 42 to 45 produced Roman pottery (fourteen sherds in pit 42, only four from the rest combined). Pit 42 was 1.43 m wide and 0.30 m deep. Pit 43 seems to have been 1.10 m wide and 0.75 m deep, with three fills; pit 44 was 1.80 m wide and 0.65 m deep; and pit 45, 0.83 m wide and 0.33 m deep.

At the far eastern end of the site, layers 154, 189, and 194 (all probably the same layer) consistently produced Roman pottery and were truncated by medieval pits. It is possible these layers represent a 'dark earth' marking the end of Roman occupation.

Eleventh Century

Features of this period include gully 1000 and extensive rubbish pits (1, 4, 11, 13=37, 16=35, 22, 30, 31, 32, 34, 40, 41) with just a couple of other features or layers (26, 62). The majority of the pits lie on or very close to the line of the recently removed boundary wall, strengthening the hypothesis that this marked an original burgrave-plot division, as the natural location for rubbish pits would be against a boundary.

Gully 1000 was 5.75 m long within the excavated area, extending out of site to the west and was excavated as slots 19, 25, and 29. It was 0.41 m wide and 0.09 m deep at its terminus, slightly wider (0.54 m wide) where it exited

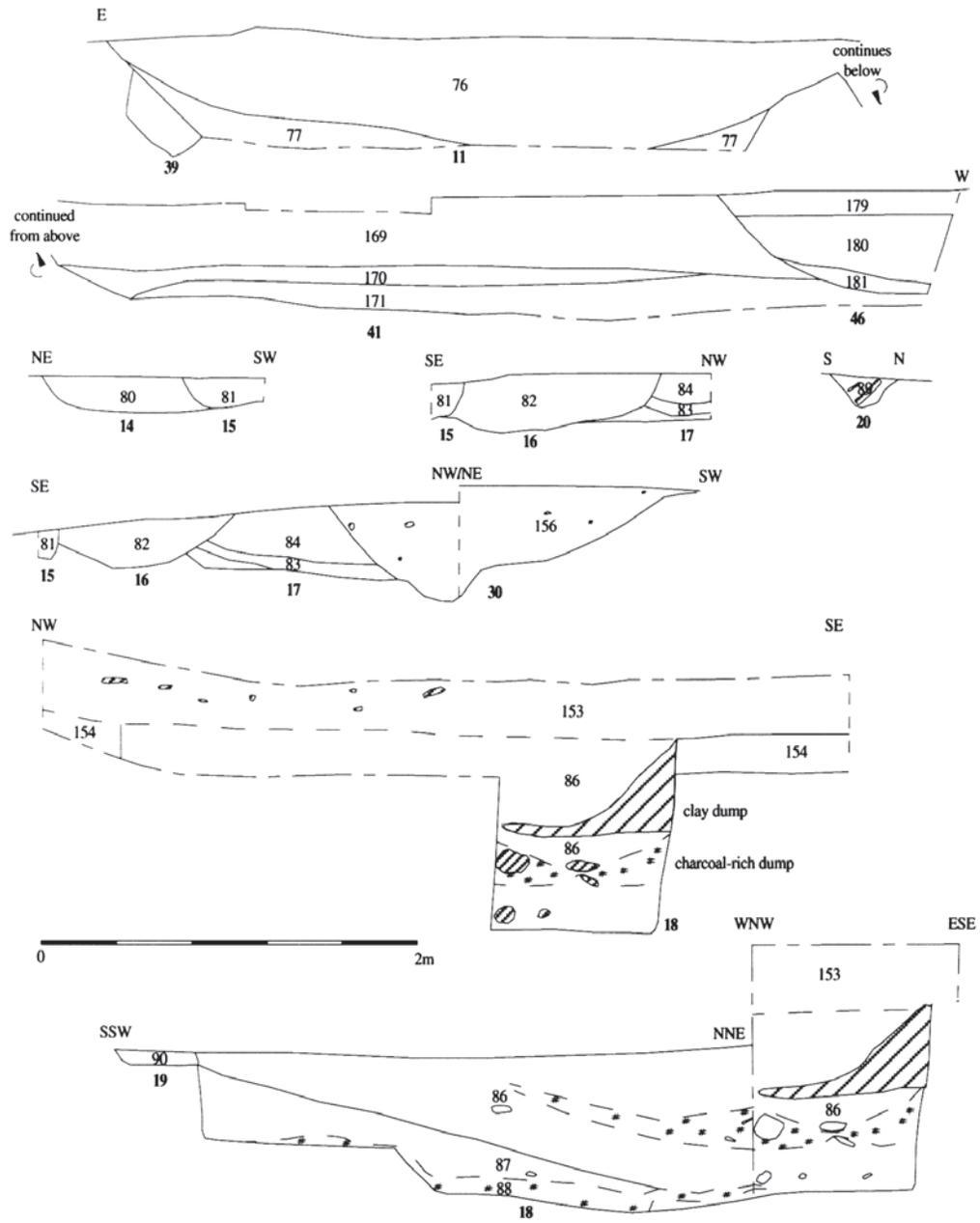


Fig. 3. High Street, Burford: selected sections (1)

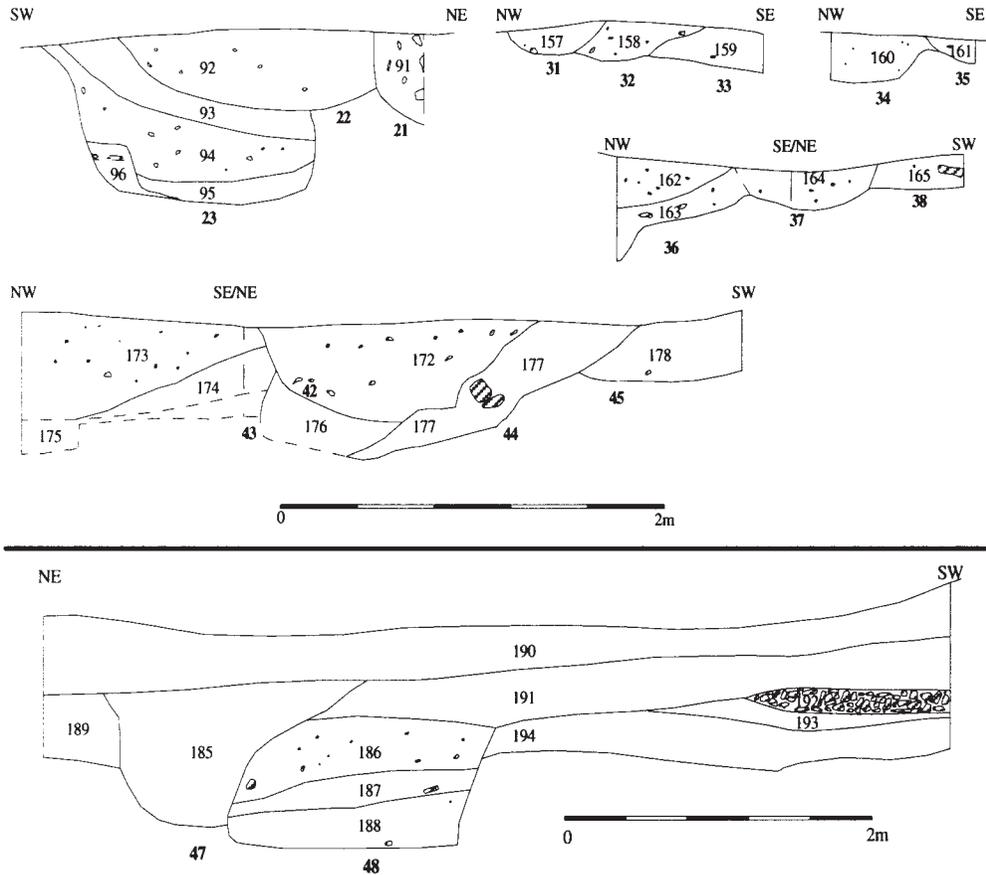


Fig. 4. High Street Burford: selected sections (2)

the site. Three slots were excavated, including one (19) some 2.75 m long from the terminus. It was sealed in places by layer 153 and possibly 154, and appears to have been truncated by quarry 1001. Pottery came from two bottom fills, 150 and 155, amounting to thirty-three Roman sherds, one Saxon, and three medieval, which have been taken to date it. No finds came from the long slot and terminal, 19.

Pit 13 contained four tiny sherds of Roman pottery, probably from the gully it cut through, and one large sherd of eleventh-century pottery. Pit 13 is the same feature as pit 37: 1.60 m wide and 0.40 m deep. Pit 16 was 1.03 m wide and 0.27 m deep and contained twelve small sherds of Roman pottery and eleven larger sherds dating from the eleventh century. This was the same feature as 35, which contained no finds. Pit 17 was the same as pit 34, approximately 2 m across and 0.25 m deep, but heavily truncated; pit 34 contained eleventh-century pottery.

Pit 22 was cut by 21 and in turn cut 23. It was 1.30 m in diameter, 0.40 m deep, and contained thirteen sherds of Roman and two sherds of eleventh-century pottery. Pit 24 was roughly square (0.96 m by 0.91 m) and 0.48 m deep and produced nineteenth-century pottery (nineteen sherds). Pit 26 was 0.87 m long and 0.29 m wide, 0.15 m deep, probably a tree bowl. It had a single tiny scrap of eleventh-century pottery.

Pit 30 cut pit 17 and had twelve sherds of Roman pottery but is dated by two medieval sherds. Pits 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35 were all part of a large intercutting group. Pit 31 had a single sherd of Roman pottery but cut 32 with five eleventh-century sherds. Pit 34 had one sherd each of Roman and eleventh-century pottery.

The eastern part of the site seems to have been almost wholly taken up by one single, huge quarry pit. This was explored mainly by sondage, as the foundation design was not going to penetrate below this level, but with predictably difficult interpretation following. What have been assigned in the record as separate pit cuts (11, 39–41, 46) are more probably, on reflection, dumps within one huge feature, occupying all but the extreme north-east corner of this area. Feature 11 was recorded as 3.8 m long, 0.75 m wide, and 0.58 m deep. It had sixteen sherds of Roman pottery and three medieval. Pit 39, 0.40 m in diameter, 0.40 m deep, was cut by 11. Feature 40 was also uncertain, but at least very large, 4.41 m long, 0.74 m wide, and 0.62 m deep; it produced ten Roman sherds

and twenty-two sherds of eleventh-century pottery. Pit 41 was even bigger, 4.60 m by 0.70 m and 0.69 m deep. Unfortunately its finds are mixed with those from 46; those assigned to 41 included twenty-one Roman and twenty-nine medieval sherds, and it is not impossible there was a Roman feature here, below a medieval one. Pit 46 was 1.60 m long and 0.70 m wide, 0.45 m deep. Finally pit 7 produced no finds but stratigraphically is sandwiched between eleventh-century features.

Immediately south of the excavated area, in the evaluation trench, layer 62 appeared to seal pit 7, layer 70, and a short stretch of wall (69). Wall 69 was aligned approximately NNE-SSW and was constructed of roughly hewn limestone, random coursed to at least six courses, with a bonding material of silty clay. One piece of twelfth- to thirteenth-century pottery was found within its make-up. Although no construction cut could be found nor its relationship with pit 7 discerned, both were sealed by layer 62 which contained sherds of eleventh–twelfth century pottery. The wall appeared in plan to turn at right angles (to head WNW) after 2 m, but it was petering out here, and this may be no more than collapse dragged out of position. This wall would have been perpendicular to a modern boundary, marked on site by a drystone wall, which is thought to indicate the original burgage-plot boundary (see Fig. 1), so it is possible that wall 69 marked the rear of the original medieval plot fronting High Street (and perhaps backing on to another fronting Guildenford). It is not clear quite how far from the High Street the original burgage plots extended: if wall 69 was a rear boundary, this gives a plot some 84 m (91 yards) long from High Street.

Twelfth to Thirteenth Centuries

Dating to this phase are just a handful of larger pits (2, 3, 47, 48, 1001) and layers (51, 56, 191–3). Pit 1001 appears to have been a quarry, 3.1 m long, 3.1 m wide (running into the baulk) cut vertically 0.49 m down to a broad flat step, then down again to a total depth of 0.82 m, giving on to a flat base. It seems to have cut gully 1000. This pit contained the largest pottery assemblage on the site, in total (including some from posthole 20, which was within the pit) some 69 Roman sherds and 496 medieval sherds, giving a date in the early twelfth century. Pits 47 (1.60 m wide and 0.90 m deep), and 48 (1.30 m wide and 0.85 m deep) extended beyond the site to the east and cut through Roman layers. Both pits 47 and 48 had mixed assemblages of pottery, including Roman, eleventh- and thirteenth-century sherds; they must date from the thirteenth century. These pits cut layer 189=194 (the same layer as 154 to the west) which consistently produced Roman pottery.

Later features

Few features later than the thirteenth century were present; those that were included post-medieval pits 15–21, 24, 49, and 100. Pits 6 and 14 could be medieval or post-medieval; in any case, neither contained finds. Pits 200–206 (not marked on Fig. 2) were only partially visible in the watching brief, north of the house plots; of these, only 201 produced finds, a single sherd of sixteenth-century pottery. Pits 49 and 100 were unexcavated but produced sixteenth-century pottery (and earlier material) from their surfaces. Pit 5, thought in the evaluation to be thirteenth century, was shown to be modern, although it did contain medieval pottery, presumably as a result of cutting through the large quarry.

FINDS

POST-ROMAN POTTERY by PAUL BLINKHORN

The full pottery assemblage comprised 1,304 sherds, with a total weight of 10,439 g (Table 1). The 327 Roman sherds are reported separately (Lyné below). The estimated vessel equivalent (EVE), by summation of surviving rimsherd circumference was 2.87. The bulk of the assemblage comprised medieval wares dating from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, although large quantities of mainly residual Roman pottery were also present. The post-Roman assemblage is very fragmented, and also appears largely to be the product of secondary deposition. The assemblage was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Table 1).¹⁹

The following fabrics are not included in the Oxford type-series:

E/MS: *Early/middle Saxon handmade ware*, AD 450–850. Moderate organic voids up to 4 mm. 1 sherd, 4 g.

F301: Bristol C Ware. Very hard, grey fabric with lighter surfaces. Glossy, variegated green glaze. Late eleventh to twelfth century. 9 sherds, 101 g, EVE = 0.

¹⁹ Maureen Mellor and Gwynne Oakley, 'A summary of the key assemblages. A study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century', in T. G. Hassall, C. E. Halpin, and M. Mellor, 'Excavations at St Ebbe's 1967–1976: part II: Post-medieval domestic tenements and the post-Dissolution site of the Greyfriars', *Oxoniensia*, 49 (1984), pp. 181–211; Maureen Mellor, 'Oxford Pottery: a synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, 54 (1994), pp. 17–217.

TABLE 1. MEDIEVAL POTTERY FABRIC SUMMARY

Code	Description	Date	No	Wt (g)	EVE
E/MS	Early/middle Saxon handmade ware	AD 450–850	1	4.	
OXR	St Neots ware type T1(2)	AD 1000–1150	6	55	0.13
OXAC	Cotswold-type ware	AD 975–1350	881	7170	2.49
OXBF	North-east Wiltshire ware	AD 1050–1400	4	43	
OXY	Medieval Oxford ware	AD 1075–1350	10	56	
OXBB	Minety ware.	Early 12th–15th century	27	276	0.9
OXAM	Brill/Boarstall ware	AD 1200–1600.	7	84	0.16
OXBN	Tudor Green ware	Late 14th century to c. 1500.	1	25	
OXCL	Cistercian ware	AD 1475–1700.	4	15	
OXST	Frechen Stoneware	AD 1550–1700	2	40	
OXDR	Red earthenwares	AD 1550 onwards	2	38	
WHEW	Mass-produced white earthenwares	Mid-19th–20th century	23	356	
F301	Bristol C ware	Late 11th–12th century	9	101	

The range of fabric types is very typical of western Oxfordshire, being dominated by the various products of the Cotswold industries. The presence of the Bristol wares is worthy of note; these represent perhaps the only finds of such material in the county of Oxfordshire.

Chronology and Pottery Occurrence

The bulk of the post-Roman assemblage is Saxo-Norman or later. The presence of the early to middle Saxon handmade sherd is of some interest, as such pottery is a rare find in such a westerly area. Mellor²⁰ suggested that chaff-tempered wares continued in use in the west of Oxfordshire until the beginning of the late Saxon pottery tradition (OXR and OXAC), so it is entirely possible that the handmade sherd at this site could be contemporary with the earliest of the late Saxon wares.

The date of the beginning of the late Saxon tradition in this area, particularly that of OXAC, is problematic. Fairfield, in Gloucestershire, has produced evidence of the material being in use in the later ninth century, and a sherd with a similar date is known from Cricklade.²¹ Generally, however, it seems to have become common in the west in the early years of the eleventh century, which broadly agrees with Vince's dating for similar wares at Gloucester.²² The sherds of St Neots ware which were noted here are all Denham's T1(2) type, which had a currency of AD 1000–1150,²³ with earlier types absent, so it seems that a start date of the early eleventh century for the main phase of occupation is the most likely.

Each context-specific pottery assemblage has been given a Ceramic Phase (CP) date based on the range of ware types present, and then checked against the stratigraphic matrix, and the dating adjusted accordingly. There was activity at the site from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, after which time very little pottery was deposited.

The pottery occurrence by fabric type for the earlier medieval phases is shown in Table 2. The most common pottery type in CP1 contexts is actually residual Roman pottery (see Lyne below), with the bulk of the contemporaneous assemblage made up of OXAC. This fabric continues to be dominant in phases CP2 and CP3, when considerably less Roman pottery was present. It is interesting that none of the minor early medieval wares (OXBF and OXY) occur in CP1, despite the fact that their chronology from further east suggests that they were in use in Oxford before the end of the eleventh century. The same comment applies to the Bristol ware, which occurs in Bristol from the late eleventh century onwards.

TABLE 2. POTTERY OCCURRENCE, MEDIEVAL CERAMIC PHASES ONLY
(PERCENTAGE BY WEIGHT)

Phase	Date (century AD)	No.	Wt	RB	OXR	OXAC	OXBF	OXY	F301	OXBB	OXAM
CP1	11th–early 12th	260	1791	53.9%	1.8%	44.0%	–	–	–	–	–
CP2	Early 12th–early 13th	805	6556	7.5%	0.1%	85.6%	0.7%	1.3%	1.3%	4.1%	–
CP3	13th–late 14th	97	880	3.6%	1.6%	81.5%	–	0.8%	1.9%	1.0%	9.5%

²⁰ Mellor, 'Oxford Pottery', p. 36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²² Alan G. Vince, 'The medieval ceramic industry of the Severn Valley (Southampton Ph.D. thesis, 1984).

²³ Varian Denham, 'The Pottery', in John H. Williams, Michael Shaw, and Varian Denham, *Middle Saxon Palaces at Northampton*, Northampton Development Corporation Monograph, 4 (Northampton, 1985), pp. 46–64.

Qualitative Analysis

Generally the assemblage is of poor quality, very fragmented, with no cross-fits, and most of the context-specific assemblages appear to comprise sherds from different vessels. No reconstruction of any sort is possible, and it appears entirely secondary in nature. This is borne out by the mean sherd weight. Excluding the Roman wares, the mean sherd weight for CP1 groups is 7.2 g, 8.3 g for CP2, and 9.1 g for CP3. These figures are very low for pottery of the period, with the mean sherd weights for the residual Roman pottery being similar in each case (6.6 g, 7.0 g, 8.0 g).

Vessels

The range of vessel forms, as evidenced by rimsherds, was extremely limited. Most were jars, with a total EVE of 2.63, or 91.6 per cent of the assemblage. Bowls and jugs were each represented by only one sherd, both from CP3 contexts. A single OXAC rimsherd was noted with stamped decoration, and a single bodysherd in the same fabric with incised lines, but the bulk of the assemblage throughout the earlier medieval period consisted of plain OXAC jars. The assemblage is too fragmented for any of the sherds to warrant illustration.

ROMAN POTTERY by MALCOLM LYNE

Of the 327 sherds of Roman pottery from the site, 242 are residual in medieval contexts and just 85 from probable Roman features. Nearly all of these sherds are Late Roman in date and from the Oxfordshire kilns (Table 3). There is a predominance of Oxfordshire grey wares in fabric R30 (57 per cent), including examples of Young's²⁴ jar forms R24 and R38, and dishes of form R53. Oxfordshire red/brown colour-coat forms are less significant (9 per cent) but include fragments from several beakers, including form C20 (c. AD 270–400), and bowls of forms C51 (c. AD 240–400) and C75 (c. AD 325–400). Minority Oxfordshire kiln fabrics include fine greyware fabric R10, black fabric R50, oxidized fabrics O11 and O80, whiteware fabric M22, and parchment ware W11 (5 per cent combined): the last-mentioned fabric is represented by sherds from two form P24 bowls (c. AD 240–400).

The most significant non-Oxfordshire fabric is BB1, from production sites around Poole Harbour, in Dorset (10 per cent): all of the identifiable forms are third- to early fourth-century in date. Other non-local wares are late Lower Nene Valley colour-coat (c. AD 270–400+), Harrold shell-tempered from Bedfordshire (c. AD 300–400+), Central Gaulish samian (c. AD 120–200), Moselkeramik from Trier (c. AD 200–75), and pink grog-tempered ware from near Towcester (c. AD 250–400): these are represented by fragments from just one or two vessels each (9 per cent combined). The Central Gaulish samian sherds are slightly earlier than most of the wares, but are probably from old vessels remaining in use during the third and fourth centuries.

The presence of two sherds from open forms in Alice Holt/Farnham greyware with internal black slip suggests continued occupation after AD 370, as vessels from this source are not thought to have been traded this far west until the last years of the fourth century.

Evidence for early Roman activity takes the form of a sherd in Oxfordshire coarse sand and grog tempered fabric R21, possibly from the Boars Hill kilns (c. AD 50–150) and two handmade storage-jar fragments in oxidized grog-tempered fabric.

STRUCK FLINT by STEVE FORD

Just six struck flints were recovered during the course of the evaluation and excavation, all residual in clearly later contexts. A narrow flake has blade-like removals on its dorsal surface and is likely to be of Mesolithic or earlier Neolithic date. The other finds (two flakes and three spalls) can only be dated generally from the Mesolithic to the later Bronze Age.

ANIMAL BONE BY CLAIRE INGREM

The phased assemblages (Table 4) are generally too small to provide evidence on which to base interpretations concerning social and economic practices and essentially conform to contemporary trends. The archive contains more complete data.

²⁴ Christopher J. Young, *The Roman Pottery Industry of the Oxford Region*, BAR 43 (1977). Fabric codes in Table 3 follow the Oxford Archaeology fabric series except where superseded by R. Tomber and J. Dore, *The National Roman Fabric Reference Collection: a Handbook* (London, 1998).

TABLE 3. ROMAN POTTERY SUMMARY BY FABRIC

Code	Fabric	Sherds	Wt (g)
F51	Oxfordshire red/brown colour-coated wares	31	119
M22	Oxfordshire whiteware	1	24
O11	Fine Oxfordshire oxidized ware	6	105
O80	Coarse Oxfordshire oxidized ware	1	1
Q21	Oxfordshire white-slipped ware	1	10
R10	Fine Oxfordshire greyware	2	17
R21	Coarse sand and grog tempered greyware. ?Boars Hill	1	3
R30	Fairly fine Oxfordshire greyware	187	1,204
R50	Oxfordshire black reduced ware	6	34
W11	Oxfordshire parchment ware	2	37
BB1	Dorset black-burnished ware	34	174
AHFA	Alice Holt/Farnham greyware	3	50
FINE	Miscellaneous colour-coated wares	2	4
GROG	Handmade grog-tempered wares	4	98
HARSH	Harrold shell-tempered ware	13	111
LNCC	Lower Nene Valley colour-coated wares	4	62
MOSL	Moselkeramik	1	2
NFCC	New Forest colour-coat	1	1
PKGTW	Pink grog-tempered ware	1	11
SAMLZ	Central Gaulish Samian	10	49
SAND	Miscellaneous greywares	10	33
MISC	Miscellaneous fabrics	4	9
OXID	Miscellaneous oxidized wares	2	18
Total		327	2,176

Eleventh Century

In the eleventh-century assemblage caprines are twice as numerous as cattle, whilst pig is present in small numbers. The horse and cattle remains all derive from the head and feet, apart from a cattle pelvis. In contrast, the caprine and pig assemblages also comprise major limb bones. Metrical data are all comparable with those recorded at contemporary sites on the ABMAP database.²⁵

Twelfth Century

Again, caprines outnumber cattle, and pig is present in small numbers. Again, most of the cattle remains are either skull or foot elements, whilst caprines and pig are better represented by major limb bones. Metrical data is comparable with measurements taken on bones recovered from contemporary sites.

The eleventh- and twelfth-century assemblages are fairly small, and the extent to which the animal bone has been biased by taphonomic processes related to differential disposal practices is difficult to ascertain. However, the predominance of caprines is in line with the pattern seen at contemporary sites and is believed to reflect the importance of the wool industry.²⁶ Evidence for the culling of mature caprines similarly suggests that a high value was placed on secondary products (wool, milk, manure), although the presence of some immature animals indicates that prime meat was still important. A predominance of adults among cattle is not unusual at medieval sites, most of the cattle remains from early medieval Lincoln²⁷ and medieval Exeter²⁸ belonged to mature animals, which again suggests that secondary products were generally more important than the production of prime meat.

CHARRED PLANT REMAINS AND CHARCOAL by LUCY CRAMP

Twelve soil samples, of 5–30 litres were taken from Roman and medieval features (Table 5). These were floated over a 0.2 mm mesh, and the flots sorted under a low-power binocular microscope at x7–x45 magnification. The

²⁵ See <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/resources.html?abmap>.

²⁶ Barbara Noddle, 'Mammal bone', in Helen Clarke and Alan Carter, *Kings Lynn Excavations, 1963–1970* (London, 1977), pp. 378–99; Terry O'Connor, *Animal Bones from Flaxengate, Lincoln c.870–1500*, *Archaeology of Lincoln*, 18,1 (London, 1982).

²⁷ T. P. O'Connor, *Bones from the General Accident Site, Tanner Row*, *Archaeology of York*, 15, 2 (London, 1988).

²⁸ Mark Maltby, *Faunal Studies on Urban Sites: the Animal Bones from Exeter, 1971–1975*, *Exeter Archaeological Report* 2 (Sheffield, 1979).

TABLE 4. ANIMAL BONE TAXA REPRESENTATION BY PERIOD (NISP)

	Roman		11th c.		12th c.		13th c.	15th c.	Other	Total
	h/c	ss	h/c	ss	h/c	ss	h/c	h/c	h/c	
Horse			6	1	1			1		8/1
Cattle	5	2	12		15	1	1	3	2	38/3
Sheep					3					3
Sheep/goat	5	1	26	3	35	4	2	2	1	71/8
Pig	1		8	1	8		1		1	19/1
Dog			4							4
Cat		1								1
Goose							1			1
Galliform			1	1	3	1		1		5/2
Bird					5	5		2		7/5
Fish								3		3
Large mammal	8	2	50	1	39		1	5		103/3
Medium mammal	5	1	15	2	28	3	3	6		57/6
Unidentifiable	5	27	31	36	94	74	1	8	7	146/137
Total	29	34	153	45	231	88	10	31	11	632
Identifiable	24	7	122	9	137	14	9	23	4	349
% identifiable	83	21	80	20	59	16	90	74	36	55

h/c: hand-collected
ss: from sieved sample

majority of flots were sorted in full; however, samples 2, 3, and 4 were found to be so rich in preserved material that sub-samples (of 1/8, 1/8, and 1/4 respectively) were sorted and analysed and the results scaled up appropriately. Plant remains and charcoal were then identified at x7-x10 and up to x400 magnification respectively. All except sample 10 contained carbonized cereal grains, along with lower concentrations of chaff, weed seeds, and charcoal. Taxa and their abundance for these samples are presented in Table 5.

The samples all contained varying concentrations of preserved cereal grains and arable weed seeds, although chaff was almost entirely absent. Samples from pits 18 and 20 were particularly rich in cereal grains, and whilst the absence of chaff suggests that this was due to burning of a deposit of cleaned grain, it is also possible that this, instead, results from a taphonomic bias acting upon grain-processing debris. The mixing of spelt and free-threshing wheat in a number of deposits suggests that there has been a degree of reworking of either Roman or medieval material. Charcoal was usually too fragmentary to be identified, but where present shows the exploitation of a mixed-fuel economy, comprising mainly oak and hazel and *Pomoideae* scrub.

Cereal Grains

The majority of samples yielded only a moderate scatter of carbonized cereal grains, which, in the absence of chaff and weed seeds, is likely to result from the accidental charring of cleaned grain. Deposits from Roman gully (1002 (12)) and Roman pit 23 contained a low abundance of spelt wheat and barley, but were dominated by free-threshing wheat. This would be very unusual for this period, since free-threshing wheat is more commonly cultivated by the late Saxon/early medieval period; this material is therefore likely to have become worked into the earlier features, which would not be surprising, given the proximity of these features to relatively grain-rich medieval contexts.

Samples from fills in medieval pit 20 were extremely rich in grain, containing up to 156.8 items per litre of sediment. These were dominated by free-threshing wheat (free-threshing *Triticum* sp. – *aestivum* or *turgidum*), although some spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*) and grains which would only be identified as *Triticum* sp. were also present. The spelt wheat may well reflect residual material from earlier Roman activity.

Barley grains were well-represented in these samples. A significant proportion of these grains (38 per cent) could be identified as hulled, and since no grains that were obviously naked barley were present, it is likely that only hulled barley was grown. The ratio of twisted to straight grains was approximately 1.4:1, which suggests that the barley was mostly, or entirely, six-row. However, it is notable that only 35 per cent of barley grains could be identified as median or lateral grains. Some barley grains were also sprouted; however, this amounted to less than 10 per cent of barley grains overall, and whilst it is possible that these grains might reflect beer making, it is also likely that these sprouted accidentally if some of the grain had become damp.

Oat grains were also relatively frequent in all samples. Since the floret base is required in order to distinguish cultivated from wild species, only two grains could be identified as cultivated oats. The presence of wild oats as contaminants of the main cereal crop cannot therefore be ruled out.

TABLE 5. CARBONIZED PLANT MATERIAL

Sample	1	6	9	5	7	11	12	13	2	3	4
Cut	10	12	23	11	25	22	41	16	18	18	20
Deposit	75	78	94	76	150	92	171	82	88	86	89
Feature	Gully	Gully	Pit	Pit	Gully	Pit	Pit	Pit	Pit	Pit	Pit
Phase or Century AD	Roman	Roman	Roman	11th	11th	11th	11th	11th	12th	12th	12th
Sample vol. (L)	20	20	15	30	20	20	15	15	30	30	5
Cereals											
<i>Triticum spelta</i>	12		1	5	9*		3	4	40		8
<i>Triticum dicoccum</i> or <i>spelta</i>		2							8		4
Free-threshing <i>Triticum</i> sp. (<i>aestivum</i> or <i>turgidum</i>)	61	8	15	53	56	27	2	73	592	544**	156
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	10	4		14	5	2	4	7	244	208	180
<i>Avena</i> cf. <i>sativa</i>									8		4
<i>Avena</i> sp.	6	4		5	6	3	2	8#	304	424	196
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. (hulled - median)	1	2						1	8	16	8
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. (hulled - lateral)								2	24¥	32	8
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. (hulled)	8	2		4	7			5	40	32	28##
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. – median	1			2	2				24	16	4
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. – lateral	2					1		2	24	32	8
<i>Hordeum</i> sp.	17	5		5	9	5	1	6	88	56	44
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. – sprouted								1	16	8	4
Cerealia indet.	39	7	6	36	34	14	9	28	856	576	128
<u>No. of items/litre</u>	<u>7.85</u>	<u>1.7</u>	<u>1.5</u>	<u>4.1</u>	<u>6.5</u>	<u>2.6</u>	<u>1.4</u>	<u>9.1</u>	<u>75.9</u>	<u>64.8</u>	<u>156.8</u>
Economic plants											
<i>Corylus avellana</i> (nutshell)			1						16	16	
Cf. <i>Vicia faba</i>											4
<i>Vicia sativa</i> ssp. <i>sativa</i>											4
Cf. <i>Vicia sativa</i>											4
Weed seeds											
<i>Ranunculus acris</i> , <i>bulbosa</i> or <i>repens</i>											4
Cf. <i>Ranunculus</i> sp.										8	
<i>Atriplex</i> sp.										8	
Chenopodium or <i>Atriplex</i> sp.											4
<i>Stellaria media</i>									16		
<i>Silene</i> sp.										8	4
<i>Polygonum aviculare</i> agg.										8	4
<i>Fallopia convovulus</i>										8	

<i>Rumex</i> sp.	dock									8	4	
<i>Brassica</i> or <i>Sinapis</i> sp.	wild cabbage/ mustard etc.									8		
<i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i>	wild radish									8		
<i>Vicia</i> or <i>Lathyrus</i> sp.	vetch or tare	2			7	15		2	2	112	192	8
<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	black medick										16	4
Cf. <i>Medicago lupulina</i>	black medick		1							88	88	32
Cf. <i>Trifolium</i> sp.	clover										8	
<i>Bupleurum rotundifolium</i>	thorow wax									56	24	4
<i>Lithospermum arvense</i>	corn gromwell									32	32	24
Labiatae indet.	mint family										8	
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	ribwort plantain										8	
<i>Valerianella dentata</i>	narrow-fruited cornsalad										8	
<i>Odentites verna</i>	red bartsia										8	
<i>Galium aparine</i>	goosegrass										8	4
<i>Carduus</i> or <i>Cirsium</i> sp.	thistle										8	
<i>Centaurea</i> cf. <i>cyaneus</i>	cornflower										8	8
<i>Centaurea</i> sp.											8	
<i>Carduus</i> , <i>Cirsium</i> or <i>Centaurea</i> sp. (burst embryo)	thistle										16	
<i>Lapsana communis</i>	nipplewort										8	
<i>Anthemis cotula</i>	Stinking mayweed									56	64	4
<i>Eleocharis palustris</i>	spikerush										8	4
<i>Carex</i> sp.	sedge										8	
Gramineae indet.	grass indet.									56	64	12
Weed seed indet.										80	96	8
<u>No. of items/litre</u>		<u>0.1</u>	<u>0.1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.2</u>	<u>0.8</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0.1</u>	<u>0.1</u>	<u>17.1</u>	<u>26.1</u>	<u>26.4</u>
Charcoal												
<i>Quercus</i> sp.	oak								+	+	+++	+++
<i>Corylus</i> sp.	hazel										+	
<i>Alnus</i> or <i>Corylus</i> sp.	alder or hazel											+
Pomoideae	hawthorn, apple etc.								+		++	++

+ present ++ some +++much

* 1 glume ** 8 sprouted # 1 rachilla ## 4 sprouted ¥ 8 sprouted

Chaff

Cereal chaff was noticeably absent from the majority of samples, with only a single spelt wheat glume base present in gully 1000 (sample 7), and an oat rachilla fragment in pit 16 (sample 13). This low abundance in comparison with cereal grains and weed seeds in pits 18 and 20 (samples 2, 3, and 4) may be a taphonomic bias, since chaff has a greater tendency to burn away entirely, or may alternatively indicate cleaned grain, with the weed seeds deriving from another source.

Other plants

A small number of fragments of hazelnut shell (*Corylus avellana*) may represent the disposal of refuse or be incidental to the burning of hazel branches as fuel. Other plants of economic significance include field beans, cultivated and fodder vetch from pit 18 (sample 4), all of which are medieval cultivars, and the latter of which was commonly grown as animal feed in the medieval period.

Weed seeds

Weed seeds are relatively numerous in samples from pits 18 and 20, but almost entirely absent from the remaining samples, suggesting that the majority reflect accidental charring of cleaned grain rather than crop processing. The weed seed assemblage is consistent with fields used for growing cereal crops, although black medick (*Medicago lupulina*), which is particularly abundant, can also grow in grassland habitats. Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) and thorough wax (*Bupleurum rotundifolium*) recovered from these pits are cornfield weeds that are believed to be late Saxon or medieval introductions.

Charcoal

Only a low abundance of identifiable charcoal was present compared with cereal grains and weed seeds. Fragments of a sufficient size to be identified showed the exploitation of oak (*Quercus* sp.) woodland and scrub, including hazel (*Corylus* sp.) and Pomoideae family (hawthorn-type) taxa.

OTHER FINDS

The site produced very few other finds from the medieval features; details are in the archive. Just three shards of blue, green, and clear glass came from medieval contexts, and all are tiny. A handful of contexts contained small quantities of burnt clay, none of it bearing any distinguishing features. Twenty-four iron items or fragments were recovered, of which twelve were nails: one hook and one spike account for the remainder of those identifiable. A tiny quantity of iron slag (52 g from 5 contexts) cannot be regarded as anything other than normal 'background noise'. Tile, most of which appears to be Roman (255 pieces, 4883 g) was recovered from twenty-nine contexts, in most of which it was residual. This durable material was often reused, so it is unclear if its presence here relates to a Roman building on the site itself.

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